

## WEEK 4 | CREATION COMPLETED | SABBATH

### GENESIS 2:1-2

**2** Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.

<sup>2</sup> By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so, on the seventh day he rested from all his work. <sup>3</sup> Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

### PSALM 92

#### A psalm. A song. For the Sabbath day.

<sup>1</sup> It is good to praise the LORD  
and make music to your name, O Most High,

<sup>2</sup> proclaiming your love in the morning  
and your faithfulness at night,

<sup>3</sup> to the music of the ten-stringed lyre  
and the melody of the harp.

<sup>4</sup> For you make me glad by your deeds, LORD;  
I sing for joy at what your hands have done.

<sup>5</sup> How great are your works, LORD,  
how profound your thoughts!

<sup>6</sup> Senseless people do not know, fools do not understand,

<sup>7</sup> that though the wicked spring up like grass  
and all evildoers flourish, they will be destroyed for ever.

<sup>8</sup> But you, LORD, are for ever exalted.

<sup>9</sup> For surely your enemies, LORD,  
surely your enemies will perish;  
all evildoers will be scattered.

<sup>10</sup> You have exalted my horn like that of a wild ox;  
fine oils have been poured on me.

<sup>11</sup> My eyes have seen the defeat of my adversaries;  
my ears have heard the rout of my wicked foes.

<sup>12</sup> The righteous will flourish like a palm tree,  
they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon;

<sup>13</sup> planted in the house of the LORD,  
they will flourish in the courts of our God.

<sup>14</sup> They will still bear fruit in old age,  
they will stay fresh and green,

<sup>15</sup> proclaiming, 'The LORD is upright;  
he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in him.'

## Commentary and background - The importance of day 7

Read Genesis 2:1-3 slowly a few times. Get different people to read each time.

### Ponder

To modern readers, day seven seems like an afterthought. It appears to be a tack-on that makes little sense to us and is even placed in a new chapter rather than the climax of the previous one.

- **Question 1** | How important are these three verses of Genesis to you?
- **Question 2** | When you think of the creation story, how significant is day 7?

### Rhythm

The word sabbath is **shabbat** in Hebrew and it literally means to **stop**, or cease, or be done. **God, the Creator, stopped, and in doing so, he built a rhythm into the fabric of creation.**

It was a pattern he set up for the world and one he designed for us to live into. We work for six days, and then we sabbath, we stop, for one.

- **Question 3** | What are the rhythms of your life? Share your weekly patterns with one another
- **Question 4** | Where is the margin, the stopping, the rest? What do you think about this?
- **Question 5** | What is the best kind of rest for you?

### Splinters

When we lose this sense of rhythm, of pace, of back and forth, we lose a part of our humanity. You are not a machine; you have a soul, and it was not created to move 24/7.

When we live without sabbath, **we go against the rhythm that God the Creator himself built into our body**, the rhythm that he wove into the fabric of all creation.

And, as the philosopher **H.H. Farmer** once said, "When you go against the grain of the universe you get splinters."

- **Question 6** | What splinters are we picking up by resisting the rhythm of Sabbath? How is it effecting our lives, and those around us (family, children etc)

### Commanded

Read Exodus 20:8-11

<sup>8</sup>Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it **holy**. <sup>9</sup>Six days you shall labour and do all your work, <sup>10</sup>but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. <sup>11</sup>For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he

rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

- **Question 7** | How seriously do we take this command? Given that it one of the ten commandments, in what way do we feel it applies to us?

## Remembering

God commands us to 'remember the sabbath'

- **Question 8** | What would the practice of sabbath help us to 'remember'?

Here are some suggestions...

- We remember there is a creator God. We live in his world, and it's good.
- We remember there's a rhythm to creation.
- We remember that we don't stop when we're finished; because we're never finished; it's never enough; we stop when the rhythm God built into our bodies says, stop.
- We remember we're not what we do or what we have or what other people think of us, we are who we are deeply loved by.

Many people fear stopping, they fear what emotions may come up – who am I if I'm not producing or performing? Sabbath is a weekly act of identity formation, we remember – I am God's loved one.

- We remember that our life with God is not a "right," but a gift, which helps us treasure it and enjoy it more.
- We remember that the world is full of evil and injustice, yes, but it's also full of goodness and beauty and truth.
- We remember that we owe it to God to be grateful and full of joy in his world.

## A Sabbath Psalm – Living in trust

Read Psalm 92

- Question 9 | Why is this a 'Sabbath' Psalm?

Notice how the Psalm is about blessing and fruitfulness, shalom and wholeness. But in the middle is also about the folly of those who do not understand and the threat of enemies.

Practicing Sabbath is about learning to live in an attitude of trust. Trusting that there will be enough food for tomorrow (manna), trusting that God will provide, trusting that we don't have to work, trusting that we are safe and that God will protect and bless us.

Recommended reading

- Keeping the Sabbath Wholly by Marva J. Dawn
- The Sabbath by Abraham Joshua Heschel
- Subversive Sabbath by A.J. Swoboda
- The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry by John Mark Comer

## Additional thoughts

The significance of God resting and its link to the temple.

### Genesis 2:2-3

<sup>2</sup> By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so, on the seventh day he **rested** from all his work. <sup>3</sup> Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he **rested** from all the work of creating that he had done.

### What does it mean to say God rested?

John Walton argues that this would not have confused the ancients who had a strong idea about the significance of divine rest.

“Without hesitation the ancient reader would conclude that this is a temple text and that day seven is the most important of the seven days.”

“In the ancient world **rest** is what results when a crisis has been resolved or when stability has been achieved, when things have ‘settled down.’”

After the passing of a crisis, things return to “normal” and we can settle down to rest.

So, this seventh day rest is not mere relaxation. It is rather a situation where “regular routines can be established and resumed without the threat of interference from chaotic forces.... And for the deity this means that the normal operations of the cosmos can be undertaken.”

### God as Ruler – from his temple

It is clear from their literature that ancient people believed that the gods rested in their temples and that they ruled from there. It was the same for the Israelites

### Psalm 132

<sup>7</sup> ‘Let us go to his dwelling-place,  
let us worship at his footstool, saying,  
<sup>8</sup> “Arise, Lord, and come to your resting place,  
you and the ark of your might.

<sup>13</sup> For the Lord has chosen Zion,  
he has desired it for his dwelling, saying,  
<sup>14</sup> ‘This is my resting place for ever and ever;  
here I will sit **enthroned**, for I have desired it.

In light of this, day seven takes on greater significance, as the climax of the creation narrative. We are told that on this day, God, having defeated, tamed or domesticated the chaotic forces of the cosmos (the waters) and brought order and purpose to the earth, he finally takes up **residence on earth as his temple**. This is significant! According to Genesis 2, the God of Israel is not limited to a temple built by man. The whole earth is his temple

## Isaiah 66:1

This is what the Lord says:

'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool.

Where is the house you will build for me?

Where will my resting-place be?

This is a substantial theological point, particularly in the ancient polytheistic world.

**Given all this, day seven is when God takes up residence in his temple.** A god was the ruler of his temple and the point, therefore, is that **the earth is God's temple**. In taking up residence in it, God assumes his role as the ruler of the **whole** earth. He takes the levers of control of the universe and rules.

Now that "creation" is complete, God assumes control as its rightful ruler with humanity serving him as his viceroy, ruling over all that he has made.

## Reflection

- **Question** | What do you think about the creation of the world as the creation of God's temple?
- **Question** | What difference does it make to us to know that God has taken up residence and control in the temple?
- **Question** | How might this link to the idea that God made us 'in his image' – as icons - to rule and order his creation on his behalf?